United Nations A/61/PV.47

General Assembly

Sixty-first session

Official Records

47th plenary meeting
Friday, 3 November 2006, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Statement by the Acting President

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): Today we are considering several items, including agenda item 42, "Report of the Economic and Social Council"; item 43, Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin"; item 44, "Culture of peace"; item 45, "The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order"; and item 49, "Sport for peace and development".

In September 2005, world leaders reaffirmed, in the World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1), the Declaration on a Culture of Peace. This year is the sixth year of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. We should indeed highlight its objectives and the true meaning of the culture of peace. It is a set of principles and conduct for a way of living designed to renounce violence and prevent the eruption of conflicts. It also focuses on the underlying causes of such conflicts. It attempts to solve problems through dialogue and negotiations between individuals, States and groups.

The agenda for a culture of peace, adopted by the General Assembly in 1999 (resolution 52/243), set out eight strengthening actions relating to the culture of peace: actions to foster a culture of peace through education; to promote sustainable economic and social development; to promote respect for all human rights; to ensure equality between women and men; to foster democratic participation; to advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity; to support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge; and to promote international peace and security.

It was the task of UNESCO — working together with a number of entities within the United Nations system, Member States and civil society — to coordinate all of the relevant activities relating to the International Decade for a Culture of Peace. Document A/61/175, which is before the Assembly today, provides a comprehensive picture of all of the important and effective activities envisaged, showing that the United Nations is playing a major and significant role in establishing a new global human order.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of initiatives taken to promote dialogue among civilizations, cultures, religions and peoples. This is a way of strengthening rapprochement, tolerance and mutual understanding of values, languages, history and culture. A number of summit conferences have focused on practical and concrete activities to foster such dialogue.

The leaders of the world, in the World Summit Outcome document, also stressed the importance of sports in all forms in strengthening a culture of peace and development. Sports can also help to promote

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tolerance and mutual understanding. The year 2005 was declared the International Year for Sport and Physical Education, and we stressed the important part played by sports in helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to improve public health. Emphasis was placed on the concept of sports as a world language that could break down barriers, including social, religious and ethnic barriers between peoples and societies and could bring people together, surpassing differences and strengthening communication and understanding. All of this would help to promote lasting peace among peoples.

Today, the world is still faced with conflict, war, violence and diseases. We all have to work together to put an end to these phenomena that hamper sustainable development and peace. The United Nations and the General Assembly play an extremely important role by developing policies and mechanisms to deal with these scourges. I myself believe that sports and propagating a culture of peace are two important elements that will help us to build a world full of tolerance, solidarity, mutual understanding and peace.

Agenda item 42

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Report of the Economic and Social Council (A/61/3)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/61/273)

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*). I would like to recall that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/316, of 1 July 2004, the Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided, at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 13 September 2006, to consider agenda item 42 in its entirety in plenary meeting, on the understanding that the administrative, programme and budgetary aspects should be dealt with by the Fifth Committee.

At the same meeting, the Assembly took note of the clarification that, in implementing resolution 58/316 to consider item 42 in its entirety in plenary meeting, the relevant parts of chapter I of the report that are under agenda items already allocated to the Main Committees will be considered by the Committee concerned for final action by the General Assembly.

Under this item, the Assembly has before it the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/61/3), a report of the Secretary-General (A/61/370), and the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (A/61/273).

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Hachani, President of the Economic and Social Council, to introduce the report of the Council.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), President of the Economic and Social Council: I thank you for this opportunity to introduce the 2006 report of the Economic and Social Council.

Development — together with peace and security, human rights and strengthening the United Nations — was a central concern of world Leaders at the 2005 World Summit. They placed the Economic and Social Council at the centre of efforts to monitor and advance implementation of the United Nations Development Agenda, in a unified and coherent way. Thus the common thrust of the Council's session this year was the follow-up to the commitments made at the Summit.

I will briefly highlight some of the key outcomes of the Council's work during the past year and then focus on the future, including the new responsibilities assigned to the Economic and Social Council by the Summit.

This year's special high-level meeting of the Council with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development helped maintain the momentum of the Summit for accelerating progress towards the agreed development goals. Advancing the realization of the Monterrey Consensus was seen as a critical element to that end. This meeting represents the centrepiece of our dialogue on the global partnership for development. As I proposed at the conclusion of the meeting, I intend to start exploring how to enhance the impact of the dialogue and to initiate consultations with all stakeholders in this regard.

The Economic and Social Council's high-level segment put productive employment and decent work squarely at the forefront of the development agenda. In particular, the ministerial declaration pertaining to employment generation and decent work for all adopted at the end of the segment identifies a number of concrete steps to make the goal of full and productive employment and decent work a central objective of national and international policies.

The need to fulfil this pledge, to which leaders committed at the Summit, cannot be overemphasized.

Widening gaps between skilled and unskilled workers, and between the formal and informal economies, have contributed to persistent and deepening inequalities worldwide. The General Assembly may wish to build on the work of the Economic and Social Council on this central issue.

The Council's coordination segment dealt with another aspect of the on-going efforts to push the development agenda forward: how to translate economic growth into effective social development, including the eradication of poverty and hunger. The debate showed that we do not have definite answers. The Council, therefore, asked the United Nations system to continue to study this question. An important feature of the coordination segment was the follow-up event on avian flu, which took place in the presence of a number of high-level representatives from Governments and relevant international and non-governmental organizations. Discussions during this panel demonstrated the importance of the Economic and Social Council's coordinating role and its ability to shape responses to emerging challenges of this nature.

The Council's work on the operational activities for development was of special significance this year. For the first time, the Economic and Social Council launched the triennial review of funding for development cooperation. The debate on the subject highlighted the diverging trends between core and non-core resource flows, the increasing complexity of funding mechanisms and the associated challenges to the financial sustainability of United Nations system's development cooperation efforts. The Council evaluated how far the United Nations development system has gone in implementing the Assembly's guidance during the last Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review. Expectations are high for the 2007 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review, given the unprecedented focus on the United Nations role in development cooperation and on the need for greater coherence and impact in its work.

During the humanitarian affairs segment, the Council gave guidance on how to reinforce the coordination of the humanitarian activities of the United Nations system and of others. It gave strong support for the humanitarian reform agenda and made several proposals for dividing the work of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on humanitarian policy issues.

The Economic and Social Council is vested with the authority to promote an integrated approach to peace and development. The call to address the root causes of the world's threats and challenges involves unlocking and strengthening the implementation of the United Nations development agenda. Ultimately, development and security can come only from integrated policies that promote poverty eradication, sustainable development and human rights of our societies. The Assembly may want to draw upon the work of the Council in this area, especially for its deliberations on the prevention of armed conflict.

In the general segment, the Council focused on consolidating and coordinating the work of its subsidiary bodies. The Council's role in that sphere is becoming all the more important as we proceed to implement the development agenda. To that end, the Economic and Social Council had invited the functional commissions and other relevant subsidiary bodies to examine their methods of work, and this year several commissions have given renewed attention to their working methods.

Moreover, the agreement to extend the Economic and Social Council's ad hoc advisory groups on Guinea-Bissau and Haiti is a clear recognition of the useful contribution the Council can make by promoting an integrated approach in that area. We now need to ensure that the lessons learned during the Council's experience benefit the future work of the Peacebuilding Commission through continuous engagement between the relevant bodies.

It is also noteworthy that the Council adopted a resolution on promoting youth employment, in which it urges Governments to consider youth employment as integral to their overall strategies for development and collective security, and encouraged mainstreaming youth employment in poverty reduction strategies.

The Council achieved another major breakthrough in crystallizing its own role and the role of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society. Agreement on a clear and well-defined intergovernmental process, including the additional new tasks for the Commission, together with broad multi-stakeholder engagement in the recently launched Global Alliance for Information and Communications Technologies and Development, carry the potential to make a strong and far-reaching

contribution to strengthening the United Nations role in this area and putting information and communications technologies in the service of the United Nations development agenda.

The 2005 World Summit placed important responsibilities on the Economic and Social Council for reviewing and monitoring the implementation of the United Nations development agenda. Responding to this call will be an important tenet of the Council's work in the coming years. So, let me share with the Assembly what I personally see as the opportunities that the new functions of the Council offer, especially for the General Assembly. Obviously, the resolution Member States are finalizing will give, I hope, more detailed guidance on how the new mandates of the Economic and Social Council are to be made operational.

First, the annual ministerial-level substantive review provides a new mechanism for the review of progress and for promoting implementation of the outcomes of United Nations conferences and summits, including internationally agreed development goals. In my view, the annual review, owing to its ministerial participation, can identify implementation deficiencies at the global, regional and national levels, as well as their linkages, and help the international community track policies in support of the agreed development goals and to make necessary adjustments. I hope the General Assembly will draw upon the work of the Council in the annual meeting on development that, pursuant to its resolution 60/265, the Assembly must hold during the debate on the follow-up to the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

Secondly, the high-level biennial Development Cooperation Forum provides a unique opportunity for Member States to keep global development aid cooperation issues high on the international community's agenda. The Forum should have a real impact in promoting international development cooperation and gearing development cooperation to support the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. The Forum brings together all development cooperation partners for a dialogue on key policy issues. Thus it will scale-up actions to perfect the link between normative and operational work of the United Nations, and help translate what we have learned into improved policies, strategy and practice at all levels.

Within the implementation architecture for the development agenda, on the normative side, we have a three-tier structure: the General Assembly; the Economic and Social Council; and the functional commissions, as well as a number of funds and programmes. The World Summit has challenged these bodies to organize their work in order to maximize their individual contributions for the effective realization of the goals set out in the development agenda.

Do the current agendas of both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council respond adequately to the priorities set out in the United Nations development agenda? If not, could these bodies' respective work be streamlined to allow the Assembly's Second and Third Committees and the Economic and Social Council to have a substantive discussion on key issues and achieve an integrated overview of them? While the recurrence of certain topics in various intergovernmental forums illustrates their importance and urgency, Member States might, for instance, better utilize the Economic and Social Council for initiating work on certain topics and make the most of the Council's new monitoring and review function in the implementation of certain United Nations legislation. Each body should have maximum value added and approach issues from a unique angle.

In this regard, we are all anticipating, of course, the report of the High-level Panel, which will lead, I hope, to further discussion of ways for increasing coherence in the work of the United Nations in these areas. We have already taken important strides towards a strong and more broadly capable Economic and Social Council. On the basis of the General Assembly's deliberations on the Panel's recommendations, we must also make the United Nations a better tool for development activities on the ground.

Many other outcomes of the Council are of key relevance to the work of the General Assembly, such as on human rights, social development and gender mainstreaming, to mention only a few. Outcomes in these areas, among others, will help the Second and Third Committees in their work.

My experience as President of the Council has shown me the potential of the Economic and Social Council in meeting many of the critical concerns of the international community. The profile, the convening power and the consensus building opportunity that

have been the trademark of the United Nations conferences in the last decade and-a-half can be incorporated into the Council. Indeed, the inclusive spirit of United Nations international conferences permeated this year's session of the Council. In particular, the high-level segment showed that the Economic and Social Council can effectively address cross-cutting issues in a comprehensive manner, with the participation of a significant number of ministers and high-level officials carrying diverse portfolios, as well as with the involvement of development partners and organizational decision-makers. The consultative status that the Economic and Social Council offers to the non-governmental organization community in allowing it to contribute to its work is another unique feature of this Charter organ. It is a feature that should, I believe, be strengthened.

Finally, in order to make the Economic and Social Council's old and new functions fully operational, it is important to support them with sufficient funding and to give the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council the means to carry out its duties.

The adoption of the resolution on the follow-up to the development outcome of the Summit was important. Hopefully, the ongoing consultations will be completed soon and lead to the adoption of a resolution on strengthening the Economic and Social Council. These two resolutions will serve as guide-posts in our efforts to accelerate implementation.

I would like to close with the observation that a more substantive and interactive relationship is developing between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. This relationship should help in providing meaningful and practical orientation to the international community in the implementation of the United Nations development agenda. In this process, key new functions given to the Economic and Social Council must play a central role, enabling the Council to serve as the bridge between policymaking and implementation in the area of economic and social development.

Mr. Rosengren (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union welcomes the opportunity to discuss the report of the Economic and Social Council and the work of the Council during this past year. We would like to express our appreciation to the Bureau of the Council for its leading role in contributing to a successful, substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. We would also like to extend our compliments to the Secretariat.

The 2006 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva was productive, and outcomes from the high-level coordination, humanitarian and operational activities segments were all finalized. We would like to thank all member States for their constructive approach that resulted in a timely conclusion of our negotiations.

The theme of this year's high-level segment of the Council was "Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development". It was a major step forward to bring the decent work agenda to a wider United Nations context. The European Union sees the vital importance in including the social dimension of globalization and the fundamental principles and rights to work, employment, social protection and social dialogue in the ministerial declaration.

In the operational activities segment, discussions on the role of operational activities in achieving the Millennium Development Goals provided valuable insights for further elaboration. The EU regards the debate and deliberations on the progress made in implementing General Assembly resolution 59/250, on the triennial comprehensive policy review, as a very good and sound basis for the preparations for the next review, in 2007. The EU remains committed to being a constructive partner during that preparation process.

Strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance at all levels was the crucial theme of the humanitarian affairs segment. In that regard, the EU looks forward to further strengthening the United Nations humanitarian system and sees the cluster leadership approach, inter alia, as a useful way to strengthen humanitarian coordination. The

traditional transition event, organized in Geneva, also provided valuable input for our joint work on the transition from relief to development. In addition, the panel discussions on gender-based violence and chronically underfunded emergencies provided a good basis for further discussions on both of those important topics.

In the general segment of the substantive session, more than 40 resolutions were adopted. However, work remains to be done. In that regard, the EU is looking forward to a constructive resumed session of the Economic and Social Council and hopes that all outstanding issues can be resolved in a timely manner.

With regard to the 2006 Special High-level Meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the EU acknowledges the continued work aimed at coherence, coordination and cooperation in the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1).

The EU attaches great importance to strengthening and revitalizing the Economic and Social Council along the lines set out in the World Summit Outcome Document. We hope that the negotiations on the draft resolution on reform of the Economic and Social Council will gain new momentum so that the Council can continue its work with reform functions at its next substantive session. We encourage the co-Chairs to continue to provide leadership for our work in fully implementing the mandate given by the Summit.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): I would like to begin by thanking my dear friend and colleague Ambassador Ali Hachani, President of the Council, for introducing the 2006 report of the Council (A/61/3), which provides a very good overview of its work.

I would first like to highlight a few issues that emerged from this year's substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. The theme for this year's high-level segment was well chosen. Decent work for all is a key tool for harnessing the energy of individuals in the fight against poverty and threats to our security. A decent job constitutes a stake in society and therefore a contribution to stability; sustainability follows. We are therefore of the view that an employment strategy should be a fundamental component of any development strategy. In the outcome of the segment, the ministers and heads of delegations highlighted the importance of harnessing that societal energy. They recognized the important role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to that end as well as the importance of ratification and implementation of the ILO conventions.

In that context, I would like to draw the special attention of members to the importance of promoting gender equality. By empowering women and ensuring equal opportunity, countries can achieve great gains in both economic and social terms. However, there is a long way to go. Women are still much more likely than men to be poor, malnourished and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to employment, and they are far less likely than men to be politically active. Women's empowerment should be at the centre of any employment strategy. Ensuring gender equality is vital to sustainable development and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

During the operational activities segment, the Economic and Social Council launched the triennial review of funding for development cooperation. The substantive resolution adopted by the Council on operational activities shows its determination to perform its role by providing detailed guidance to the United Nations development system in order to improve its functions at the country level, as well as guidance to the Secretariat in order to strengthen its assessment and analytical work.

Let me now turn briefly to the coordination segment, which dealt with another central issue in the ongoing efforts to implement the development agenda: how to translate economic growth into effective social development, including the eradication of poverty and hunger. During the deliberations, it became clear that we do not have definite answers in that regard. The Council asked the United Nations system to continue to study that question.

Of all the issues covered by the general segment, I would like to highlight only the decisions dealing with the Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on countries emerging from conflict, with respect to which we have once again established the primary importance of the Economic and Social Council in the area of long-term sustainable development in post-conflict situations. The continuation of the Groups on Haiti and Guinea-Bissau is an indication of that importance.

We can be fairly satisfied with the overall outcome of this year's substantive session.

I would now like to turn briefly to the future role of the Economic and Social Council, which is facing new challenges in the light of its new functions mandated by the Summit. It is now more important than ever that we avoid the overlapping and duplication of work. The new annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council and the annual meeting of the General Assembly mandated by paragraph 56 of the development follow-up resolution (60/265) should, for example, build on each other's outcomes rather than duplicating what the other is doing. The Economic and Social Council should closely follow the work of the Peacebuilding Commission and prepare a long-term foundation for the economies concerned rather than waste its energy on duplicating the Commission's efforts.

Another new challenge for the Economic and Social Council will be the outcome of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on system-wide coherence. Coordination remains central to the Council's functions, and I am sure that the outcome of the Panel will strengthen the work of the Council in that area.

As I have had the honour to serve as Vice-President of the Council this year, the Economic and Social Council has become closer to my heart. I would therefore like to express my deep concern at the lack of progress in the negotiations on strengthening the Economic and Social Council. If we are to have a meaningful Council session next year, we all have to show flexibility and arrive at compromises very soon.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, on behalf of the Russian delegation, I would like to extend our thanks to the President of the Economic and Social Council, Mr. Hachani, for the detailed information he gave us on the very useful and important work done by the Council at its last session under his extremely able guidance.

The Russian Federation offers a positive assessment of the work done by the Economic and Social Council this year. In concluding the annual session, its member States expressed full support for the Council as the principal coordinating body of the United Nations in the social and economic areas. They also confirmed the principles of a comprehensive and coordinated implementation of decisions taken by major conferences and summits, and recognized the need to improve the interaction between the Council and the functional commissions, in addition to ensuring greater interaction among the functional and regional commissions.

We regard as fully successful the outcome of the substantive session of the Council, focusing organizations in the United Nations system on constructive work to actually implement the decisions taken at the 2005 World Summit in respect of a major reform of the United Nations system. It was important that the Economic and Social Council's crucial role was proclaimed decisive in ensuring political and policy guidance for all activities in this area. A very solid package of decisions was taken by the Council in determining the basic parameters for international cooperation in support of sustainable growth and development of all countries in the world today, as well as for the promotion of the maximum development of the potential of the social and economic sector in the United Nations system.

We stress the importance of the ministerial declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council, which even more clearly sets forth the guidelines for future activities in the United Nations system in the area of strengthening the foundations for sustainable development at the national and international levels. We believe that that document, and indeed the entire course of the very interesting and substantive discussion at the high-level segment, actually do correctly reflect the level of consensus reached on matters relating to employment and the rights of workers as it exists today among the various countries. We also welcome the outcome of work of the segment on operational activities.

It was fundamentally important that the Economic and Social Council confirmed the current three-tiered structure for operational activities with a clear division of labour between the General Assembly, which sets forth a political guideline, and the Economic and Social Council, which turns those policy guidelines into actual decisions for the operational agencies to implement. We believe that the main conclusions of the operational segment were the decisions on the priorities for the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in respect of the triennial review of the operational activities of the United Nations for development, confirming the decisive role

played by Assembly resolutions on all matters relating to operational activities.

Russia is an active member of two regional economic commissions — the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). We are pleased that the Economic and Social Council confirmed the key role played by regional commissions in developing a balanced global policy on trade, economic and financial issues, and also in coordinating and assessing implementation of decisions at major conferences and summits at the regional level.

We were pleased that a positive assessment was offered of the reform of the ECE. We believe that the forum made it possible to further improve the management structure of the Commission, to strengthen its accountability and transparency and to restructure its programme of work, so that it is now based on the priorities of ECE member States and takes account of the new political and economic realities in Europe.

We greatly appreciate the work done by ESCAP, inter alia, in developing a transport network and in dealing with issues relating to energy security and information technology. This work is proceeding along the lines of Russian proposals to establish a new transport, energy and information communications infrastructure in Asia and the Pacific.

The Russian Federation advocates the further strengthening of cooperation between the Economic and Social Council and the international financial and trade institutions. The meeting at the high-level segment with the heads of those institutions confirmed the growing authority of the Economic and Social Council as a forum for global dialogue and interaction among partners with all interested players, so as to discuss emerging global tendencies and policies and to react effectively to events that take place in the international arena in the economic, environmental and social areas.

The practice of holding an annual high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is also valuable and we believe this practice should be continued, taking into account the powers, mandates and decision-making modalities of the institutions involved. We believe that the next such meeting will be a major milestone in preparing for a regular high-level dialogue on financing for development, both here in the General Assembly and, subsequently, at the upcoming international conference on reviewing the implementation of decisions taken at Monterrey.

In conclusion, I would like to make the following point: the 2005 World Summit gave a clear mandate regarding measures to be taken to strengthen the Economic and Social Council. We think that the draft resolution, as it stands now, is a very appropriate response to the instruction given us by the leaders of the Member States of the United Nations. We believe that work on it should be completed as soon as possible, particularly because the delegations during consultations have already been able to move significantly forward towards a common understanding of the fundamentally important elements therein. We hope that a consensus version of the draft will be available shortly, establishing sensible and pragmatic parameters for the work of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Rachkov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus studied with interest the report on the work of the Economic and Social Council. We would like to extend our thanks to Ambassador Ali Hachani for introducing it to us.

This year was very special because it began the period of implementing agreements on supporting developments throughout the world and following up on decisions taken at the 2005 World Summit at the United Nations. If we really want to speed up the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, then it is clear that we must strengthen the coordinating mechanisms of the United Nations. In particular, we must strengthen the capacity of the Economic and Social Council. It is for that reason that, in the past year, we have attached such importance to making progress in the negotiations to reform the Council.

We continue to believe that the purpose of reform must be to assist the Council in playing its primary role of making development a success instead of a problem. To that end, we must direct the full potential of United Nations agencies and bodies in the economic and social area towards providing practical support to Governments most in need of assistance in achieving their national development strategies. The Economic and Social Council must become an international

forum for important international decisions in support of development. That should be the goal of the negotiations under way on reforming the Council.

Belarus hopes to become a member of the Economic and Social Council and we are ready to work hard to help it to achieve those goals. We trust that our determination will have the support of Member States and that they will support our candidacy in November's elections.

We feel quite optimistic about the Council's stepped up activity in 2006. We welcome the Bureau's decision to prepare key resolutions in New York for adoption at Geneva during the Council's substantive session. I believe that the preparatory work contributed to the adoption of well-considered and balanced decisions at Geneva. We do not agree with delegations that have expressed the view in consultations on Council reform that there is duplication in the work of the substantive sessions of the Economic and Social Council with that of the General Assembly's Second and Third Committees. The General Assembly adopts policy decisions as regards multifaceted international processes, for which prior work is often needed in the context of more specialized bodies that have a smaller membership. Complementarity between the work of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly will lead to better coordination in the activities of United Nations bodies.

Based on Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/27, a meeting of the funds and programmes of the United Nations and other international organizations was held in Tokyo in September 2006 with a view to strengthening cooperation in the area of combating human trafficking. The conclusions and recommendations emanating from that meeting were part of the recent draft resolution introduced by Belarus and adopted in the Third Committee regarding improving the coordination of efforts to combat trafficking in persons. We believe that the ideas in Council resolution 2006/24 on international cooperation in the fight against corruption and in Council resolution 2006/5 on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations will be helpful in preparing draft resolutions to be adopted on these topics at this session of the General Assembly.

The Economic and Social Council must play a key role in preparing the triennial comprehensive review of operational activities for development during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly.

The Council plays an irreplaceable role in evaluating the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment. Conclusions and proposals of the Council on those issues will constitute a real contribution by the Council to the reform and renewal of the activities of the entire United Nations in the social, economic, environmental and humanitarian spheres.

We welcome the measures taken by the Council to promote the United Nations system-wide reform process. In that regard, an important step was the Council's approval of the workplan to reform the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the revised terms of reference of the Commission. We believe that the implementation of those decisions will help the ECE to take its work to a qualitatively higher level and to adapt it to changes that have taken place in recent years in the Central and Eastern European regions. Implementation will also help the Commission to focus international assistance on European countries most in need.

We should also not forget the work done by the Economic and Social Council on the review of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society.

The foregoing constitutes the contributions of the Economic and Social Council to the work we are doing together. They provide us an opportunity to realize the importance of the efforts of the Economic and Social Council to our collective decisions to address acute international issues in the social, economic, environmental and humanitarian fields. Our task here is to establish the requisite working conditions to enable the Council to work well and play its complex coordinating and organizational role. Belarus has always believed that the Economic and Social Council should not just be a sort of testing ground for saving money. We believe that the support provided to the Council must be commensurate with its role and the tasks allocated to it. If we do that, we shall all benefit.

Mr. Gutiérrez García (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the 2005 World Summit — which is also known as the United Nations reform summit, for having placed

the issue of development outside the distorted focus on security and ambitious proposals for the Organization's reform — there was agreement on the need for a more effective Economic and Social Council as the principal organ in the coordination, political review and recommendation of issues associated with economic and social development. Nevertheless, little more than a year after reaching that agreement, we are still engaged in a complicated and protracted negotiation process regarding the future of that important organ. That is due to the clear lack of political will and flexibility on the part of developed countries, which, far from wanting true strengthening of the Council, are attempting to reinvent it with the aim of weakening its role and functions.

The agreements contained in the Summit Outcome regarding the Economic and Social Council do not substantially reformulate that organ's mandate or its mayor activities. That confirms the importance of also strengthening the work of the General Assembly's Second and Third Committees. The revitalization of the work of the Economic and Social Council should continue to be carried out in accordance with what was agreed in Assembly resolutions 50/227, 52/12 B and 57/270 B. The Economic and Social Council should continue to carry out its mandate in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the functions assigned to it by the Assembly for the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the decisions adopted by the major United Nations conferences and summits through resolution 57/270 B.

We view positively the fact that the Economic and Social Council is endeavouring to place particular focus on development issues. However, ideas relating to new subjects should not be implemented to the detriment of the current functions of the Council concerning humanitarian issues and the coordination of and follow-up to the operational activities of the United Nations system.

The revitalization of the Economic and Social Council should not imply opening up new areas for dialogue which do not contribute results or firm commitments, but rather should preserve the negotiated outcomes of the different segments of this organ.

Although the Development Cooperation Forum should be held every two years, as established by the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, it should occur without prejudice to the meetings of the Economic and Social Council during the substantive session. The Forum should not only be a place for dialogue between interested parties, but rather, preferably, a mechanism to identify and foster concrete cooperation efforts at all levels. In that regard, it is important to highlight the central role that Member States should continue to play in that context, as well as the importance of adequately regulating the participation of stakeholders such as the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil societies in general.

The ministerial level review of the outcomes of United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, should not become an area only for debate but rather should continue to be an opportunity to reach a negotiated agreement at that high level. The review should also continue to be carried out within the mandate given to the Economic and Social Council under resolution 57/270 B.

Furthermore, the special meetings of the Economic and Social Council that are convened to address humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters should not replace the function of the General Assembly to address those issues. Moreover, the subjects of such meetings should be adequately chosen, according to their relevance, as well as the right moment to convene them, so they do not become an additional burden for Member States, especially during the periods when the General Assembly committees are meeting.

It is imperative that, in accordance with the consensual decisions of the international community, the humanitarian assistance activities be carried out under the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality while respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of States. Likewise, it is an inescapable principle that assistance be provided at the request of States and with their consent, and also that each State play a key role from the start in the organization and implementation of the assistance within its territory.

Cuba supports the goal of improving the efficiency of the Economic and Social Council, but it will continue to uphold, along with the developed countries, the validity and importance of the role of the Economic and Social Council as a principal organ of

the United Nations, and will oppose any attempt to weaken it and to limit its decision-making power.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 42.

Agenda item 43

Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Note by the Secretary-General (A/61/176)

Draft resolution (A/61/L.15)

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly has before it a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, circulated in document A/61/176. I give the floor to the representative of Greece to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.15.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): It is with great honour and pleasure that I present today to the General Assembly the draft resolution on the "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin", contained in document A/61/L.15, under agenda item 43.

In recent years, the international community has become increasingly sensitive to this issue. It has demonstrated its willingness to facilitate the return or restitution of cultural property illicitly removed from its country of origin. Such removal, especially when it results from illicit trade, runs counter to all the principles culture is supposed to promote.

As we all know, the illicit removal of cultural property from its place of origin is a grave loss to the country concerned and its people. Cultural property taken out of context — that is to say, out of its natural environment — is stripped of its meaning and cut off from its natural, cultural and geographical background. Culture is the lifeblood of a nation. Its removal rips out the nation's heart and obliterates its past.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the illicit removal or destruction of cultural property deprives people of a part of their past. One has only to consider the intentional destruction of unique works of art, as in the case in Afghanistan under the previous regime, in order to understand that such a loss can never be remedied, as those treasures can never be brought back.

It is only the restitution of cultural property, taken illicitly from its place of origin, that will restore any damage caused to cultural heritage. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that Member States of the United Nations continue to cooperate actively, both bilaterally and in international forums, in a spirit of mutual understanding and dialogue, with a view to resolving any outstanding issues in that respect.

Such cooperation constitutes the most appropriate way to address the adverse effects of major political and other upheavals, including armed conflict, that have provided fertile ground for the loss, destruction, removal or illicit movement of cultural property.

In the draft resolution we have the honour to present, we tried to reflect the latest steps and activities that have been undertaken by the international community, especially in the framework of UNESCO, which has a unique responsibility as the sole agency with the mandate of promoting the stewardship of the world's cultural resources at all levels.

As in previous years, specific reference is made to a number of relevant conventions. The need for their proper implementation is also highlighted. The increase in the number of States parties to these conventions is a most encouraging trend.

Other important developments include the launching in 2005 of the UNESCO Cultural Heritage Laws Database, as well as the elaboration of a model export certificate for cultural objects. Both of these instruments are extremely useful tools in the fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property. Equally important is the effective work, the relevant recommendations and the recent revision of the statutes of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation.

At this point, I am very pleased to inform the Assembly of the return, from the University of Heidelberg, of a fragment from the Parthenon's north frieze. This gesture has symbolic value: it constitutes the first step towards the reunification of the Parthenon sculptures. The new Acropolis Museum will soon reach its completion, where the Parthenon Marbles will be

presented, reunified, in their natural historical environment.

In the international framework, as a result of closer collaboration between museum institutions, Greece has accomplished the return of a gravestone from the Boeotia region of ancient Greece from the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, as well as of a fragment of a marble relief from the Greek island of Thasos.

We strongly encourage all interested parties of the international community to continue to cooperate, within the framework of the United Nations and UNESCO, for increased mobilization and action to promote heritage values and to safeguard, return and encourage restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

Public awareness is once more a crucial part of this endeavour; it also involves Governments, civil society, academic and artistic leadership, and, of course, all of us who feel that we share a common cultural heritage.

I would like to express our appreciation and thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, as well to the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, for the tireless, constant and meaningful support they have provided on this issue. I wish to thank them for their detailed report, contained in document A/61/176, which covers a three-year period and presents all the activities that have taken place to facilitate the return and restitution of cultural property.

Action on draft resolution A/61/L.15 will be taken at a later stage; in the meantime, we will consult closely with all interested delegations. We look forward to the adoption of the draft resolution by consensus, as in previous years, and with the widest possible sponsorship, larger by far than that of previous years.

As we approach the end of the Year of the Olive Route, the symbolic value of which brings different cultures together, let us send a strong message about the return of cultural goods to their countries of origin.

Mr. Ahmed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to express our appreciation and thanks to the President of the General Assembly for her excellent conduct of the Assembly's work at its sixty-first session. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey to her the congratulations of the Sudanese women on her assumption, as the first Arab woman, of the presidency, which is a great honour to us.

My delegation would like to pay tribute to the report of the UNESCO Director-General (A/61/176). We appreciate the important role that UNESCO has played over the last three years to facilitate the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin and to encourage Member States to implement the relevant resolutions and instruments on this subject.

My country would also like to express its appreciation for the development of the model export certificate as a tool to combat illicit trafficking in cultural property. We call on Member States to adopt the model export certificate as their national export certificate. We also express satisfaction at the tremendous effort made to establish the UNESCO Cultural Heritage Laws Database so that legislation on cultural heritage can be easily accessed. We call on the organization to offer official translations of the Database in all official languages, including Arabic.

The importance of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation at its twelfth and thirteenth sessions acquires greater force, especially as regards the accession to relevant international conventions, such as The Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property During Armed Conflict and its additional protocols, the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and the Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law. We welcome all of those instruments, and we call on all Member States, with their ancient cultural heritage, to sign them in order to combat illicit trafficking and looting of cultural properties.

Over the past few years, in particular, the world has witnessed several attempts to steal the national cultural property of several countries. We call on the United Nations, through UNESCO, to exert greater efforts for the return and restitution of precious historical cultural property, and we advocate the creation of a legal mechanism to deter thieves, by

establishing a tribunal to adjudicate these crimes. In that way, the world would be spared such cultural looting, and would preserve and protect such property.

The delegation of the Sudan would like to emphasize the importance of cooperation and the exchange of information, which could not take place without specialized training in the field of protection of cultural property and exchange of information. Whether it is through the UNESCO Database, Interpol or other available means and mechanisms, we support the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Committee at its thirteenth session, which called for urgent solutions regarding the Parthenon marbles and their return to the country of origin, through dialogue leading to positive results. We also support the Committee's recommendation regarding the restitution of the sphinx to its country of origin through bilateral negotiations. We also support other recommendations made by the UNESCO Director-General — particularly recommendation no. 8, which relates to Afghanistan and Iraq.

My delegation would like to point out that throughout its history, the brotherly country of Iraq has been long subjected to acts of pillage and destruction and the burning of relics and manuscripts, and has been robbed of its cultural property. However, the catastrophe in that regard following the collapse of the former regime poses a great threat at a time when humanity has reached new heights in terms of culture, civilization, intellectual, scientific, economic and industrial dimensions. It was hoped that that would be reflected in an appreciation of the value of that cumulative heritage and culture. In fact, this catastrophe occurred in full view of the international community, which is supposed to be ruled by law and the provisions of international law. The restitution or return of Iraq's cultural property is as important as its reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The Government of National Unity, which inherited the laws protecting the Sudan's long cultural heritage, is in the process of amending and strengthening those laws to enhance their protection of that national heritage and cultural property and to enable us to discover new cultural treasures and to record them in the national archives after being transferred to national museums. My country, with its unique and rare cultural legacy, wishes to emphasize its resolve to cooperate with UNESCO and other relevant international organizations and agencies in joint efforts to return cultural property to the countries of origin and thus to attain the noble United Nations objective of preserving and protecting our human heritage and experiences.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation is taking the floor under agenda item 43, on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. Undoubtedly, that item is firmly based on the role of human culture in civilization, which is a characteristic of the development of all civilizations and their interdependence, although every culture has its essential characteristics. It is important to return cultural property to the countries of origin, particularly because such property represents the living memory of peoples who are trying to recover the cultural identity of their civilizations, which have been reduced or plundered in the past.

Thus, it is essential that the General Assembly consider this item, because it is an important area for strengthening the means to promote international cooperation. Although the Assembly has considered this issue since 1972, what has actually been accomplished remains well below the level of our expectations. In that regard, we believe it has become essential that the United Nations and its specialized agencies — particularly UNESCO — and other international bodies and organizations that monitor this illicit trade be provided with up-to-date means to monitor acts of pillaging and illicit trafficking.

The efforts undertaken by States interested in human civilization, by organizations interested in the protection of monuments and relics and by Interpol to combat such operations and to recover stolen property are still very modest compared with the scale of this human and cultural catastrophe, the diversity of its causes, the criminals and the criminal organizations to which they belong.

It is well known that my country, Iraq, is the cradle of human civilization. On its shores, the first letters of writing were inscribed 4,000 years before Christ and the first laws were codified. On its soil, the first components of states, were established, and in its temples and on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates in the north and in the south, treaties among those ancient entities were concluded.

Iraq's monuments and relics have eternalized the stages of the development of that civilization since early times, and the world's major museums still

preserve some of those prominent monuments. But the neglect and the illicit trafficking to which our documents have been subjected since the second Gulf war and the catastrophe following the collapse of the former regime are unprecedented in modern history. Iraqi monuments, whether at archaeological sites or in Iraqi museums, have been the targets of arbitrary and organized plundering and pillaging operations. Most of those operations have been conducted by elements of international organized crime, and some of these Iraqi monuments are now often seen in international museums and auction houses. From this rostrum, my delegation calls on all States and the international community and all its institutions to help Iraq protect its right to recover its cultural property and monuments. Without such assistance, it would be very difficult to attain that objective.

In that regard, my delegation wishes to emphasize paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1483 (2003), in which the Council decided that all Member States should take appropriate steps to facilitate the safe return to Iraqi institutions of Iraqi cultural property and other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific, and religious importance that were illegally removed from the Iraq National Museum, the National Library and other locations in Iraq, including by instituting a prohibition on trade in or transfer of such items, and items with respect to which reasonable suspicion exists that they have been illegally removed. We call upon UNESCO, Interpol and other international organizations, as appropriate, to assist in implementing that paragraph.

I wish to express my delegation's appreciation for the efforts of UNESCO and the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation and their role in organizing the bilateral negotiations aimed at the return of cultural property, in preparing a list of existing property and in curbing the illicit trafficking of cultural property. In particular, we ask all States and governmental and civil society organizations to cooperate to ensure the success of those efforts.

Mr. Zewdie (Ethiopia): Allow me at the outset to express my appreciation to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its continued support for efforts to return cultural property to the countries of origin, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/17, of 19 December 2003.

Ethiopia strongly and firmly believes in the principle that cultural property should not be exported from the countries of origin. It also attaches great importance to the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. Despite its firm commitment to the protection of cultural properties, Ethiopia has a vast amount of cultural resources abroad that have not yet been returned.

In an effort to address the issue of the return or restitution of cultural property, Ethiopia has taken tangible measures and actions at both the national and the international levels. In this respect, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some remarkable actions we have taken. My country has enacted a proclamation on heritage research and protection, which prevents Ethiopian heritage from being illegally exported or trafficked out of the country. It has also put in place an apparatus for the systematic inventory and registration of its cultural property through the establishment of a database of cultural legislation.

An effective customs control mechanism has also been introduced, in parallel with steps to enhance the capacity of customs experts through continuous training and education. Central to protecting our heritage and combating illicit trafficking is to increase public awareness of the value of our heritage.

In 2004, in a clear expression of our respect for international principles and provisions relating to the return or restitution of cultural property, Ethiopia signed the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. In the same year it also signed the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. My country has also reached numerous bilateral agreements with various countries aimed at preventing and combating illicit traffic in cultural properties.

My Government has pressed very hard for the return of confiscated heritage through diplomatic negotiations, legal procedures, purchases and other means. In this regard, Ethiopia rejoices that it has been able to buy back — among other items — many antique Axumite coins and the portrait of the son of an Ethiopian emperor from England and a twelfth century Ethiopian cross from Belgium.

With the cooperation of some countries, we have also succeeded in making major progress towards the restitution of magnificent artefacts. These include a statue of the "Conqueror Lion" and the throne of Empress Menen returned by Italy, and the Ethiopian traditional arms of Emperor Tewodros from England. The crowning achievement of these efforts was the return from Italy of the Axum Obelisk. Those are some of the achievements that must be credited to the peoples of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Government and, especially, the people and Governments of Italy, England, France, Belgium and other countries. We also thank UNESCO for facilitating their return. Our thanks also go to all of the friends of Ethiopia who have worked tirelessly to return to confiscated cultural properties to our country.

It is, indeed, with hope and enthusiasm that I mention the current attempt by Ethiopia to ensure the return, through the establishment of a committee comprising eminent personalities, intellectuals and foreign friends of Ethiopia, of its heritage taken by British soldiers in 1875. The Ethiopian people and Government are eagerly awaiting the return of other cultural property exported illegally by various means. For instance, there are more than 2,700 Ethiopian parchments in Europe, Asia, America and Canada. In this regard, my delegation calls upon the international community and the Governments of those countries to cooperate for the immediate restitution of our heritage.

Let me conclude by drawing the Assembly's attention to another effort that demands concerted action from the international community. Ethiopia is building a stockroom for the returned heritage, as well as a museum with a laboratory. It is the hope of my delegation that the international community will respond positively and quickly to assist Ethiopia in the accomplishment of these and other, related projects.

Mr. Mavroyiannis (Cyprus): I am taking the floor to strongly support the draft resolution introduced by the representative of Greece on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin.

Cyprus considers this very sensitive issue — in parallel, of course, with the protection and in situ preservation of cultural property — to be of paramount importance, and is deeply engaged in international efforts in this field.

We are a country that has been looted of many of its archaeological, cultural and religious treasures, and we understand the feelings of people who have been deprived of this important link to their history and civilization.

Important steps have already been taken to put in place the required legal and institutional framework for the return or restitution of cultural property. In this regard, I should like to praise the work undertaken by UNESCO and, in particular, by the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation. Now we need to focus more on implementation.

In this regard, I would like to express the hope that cases such as the return to Cyprus of the mosaics of Panayia Kanakaria and the return to Greece by the University of Heidelberg of a fragment from the Parthenon's north frieze will lead the way to greater awareness and further restitution of cultural property, including the Elgin Marbles, which have become the litmus test for the success of this lofty endeavour.

The draft resolution before us is an important testimony to the political will of the international community to achieve swift progress in this important field.

Cultural treasures are the visible footprints of the path of man through history. They are testimony to the ways found by those who preceded us to decode infinity, and constitute the connecting link with the vertical dimension, with the ideals of beauty and humanism, embodying spiritual values and the best of human skills. They are, therefore, at any given time and at any given place, the highest combined expression of the mind and of the work of human hands.

Hence, cultural property is a prominent part of the common heritage of humanity, and its presence in its rightful place is a major contribution to reconciling and reconnecting with the roots of human civilization and to promoting universal values and creation as the main vectors of cultural development.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. Before proceeding further, I would like to inform members that action on draft resolution A/61/L.15 will be taken at a later date.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 43.

Agenda item 44

Culture of peace

Note by the Secretary-General (A/61/175)

Draft resolution (A/61/L.11)

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly has before it a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), document A/61/175. I give the floor to the representative of the Philippines to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.11.

Mr. Baja (Philippines): The rise of a number of initiatives on interfaith, intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue and cooperation, evidenced by several international, interregional, regional and national events, represents growing global interest in the sustained implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace, a brainchild of Bangladesh, as well as the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and its Programme of Action, an initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the last two years, the Philippine initiatives, supported by a large number of Member States, on interfaith dialogue, namely the Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, held in New York on 22 June 2005, and the Informal Summit on Interfaith: Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace, also held in New York on 13 September 2005, helped pave the way for the adoption of paragraph 144 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome by our leaders.

The leaders committed themselves to take action to promote a culture of peace and support initiatives on dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions. This year, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation was launched in New York on 24 March. The fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana, adopted a final document on 16 September recognizing the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace. The First Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace, as well as the high-level Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, were both held in New York during the United Nations International Day of Peace on 21 September.

At the regional level, the Cebu Dialogue among South-East Asian and Pacific countries adopted a Declaration on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity on 16 March. The Sixth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), held in Helsinki on 10-11 September, underlined the importance of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue and recognized the value of the Alliance of Civilizations and the tripartite forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. ASEM partners also adopted on 5 July in Larnaca, Cyprus, an Action Plan on Interfaith Understanding and Cooperation for a Peaceful World.

From the standpoint of civil society, the world saw the largest ever gathering of religious leaders in Kyoto last August under the auspices of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. Kazakhstan hosted last September in Astana the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. The outcomes of both events reinforce and complement the conclusions of the forums of their intergovernmental counterparts.

Within the United Nations system, UNESCO agreed that interreligious dialogue is its flagship project for the biennium 2006-2007 under its intercultural dialogue programme. Moreover, there are several United Nations agencies, funds and programmes that include interreligious dialogue in their activities.

These expressions of the need for greater understanding, harmony and cooperation will continue to flourish and expand both in scale and scope. In fact, the latest initiative on the Alliance of Civilizations, co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey, is another testament to the need to involve all stakeholders in peace.

Allow me at this juncture, on behalf of the Philippines and Pakistan, to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.11, entitled "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace". The Philippines and Pakistan decided to consolidate our respective draft resolutions under the agenda item on culture of peace, not only to respond to the need to streamline the work of the General Assembly in respect of interrelated draft resolutions, but more importantly to highlight the interconnected dimensions of religions and cultures in promoting a culture of peace.

The world, in particular the faith communities and their leaders and other stakeholders, is watching how we will address the culture of peace from the prism of interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation. We hope the Assembly will adopt the draft resolution at an early opportunity so that we could move forward to implement concrete measures, particularly those mentioned in operative paragraphs 7 to 12. We warmly welcome the additional sponsorship by Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Cambodia, Congo, Costa Rica, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Gabon, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Micronesia, Morocco, Myanmar, Senegal, the Sudan, Thailand and Timor-Leste, and look forward to further sponsorship and support from Member States.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.16, which will be issued at a later date.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): I would be remiss if I began without expressing our deep appreciation to the Assembly President for convening a debate on the agenda item "Culture of peace". This item is close to every Bangladeshi heart. I am confident that the deliberations today, under the able stewardship of the President, will further strengthen our resolve to promote a culture of peace in the United Nations and beyond.

I thank the previous speaker, Ambassador Lauro Baja of the Philippines for providing full details of draft resolution A/61/L.11.

Recent history has witnessed a series of triumphs that humanity can justly be proud of. It has experienced, for example, the end of colonialism, the growth of civil society, the limiting of autocracy, the strengthening of democratic values and institutions, the rise of liberalism and the protection and promotion of human rights. Sadly, this period has also witnessed many tragedies. It has experienced unspeakable violence wreaked by wars, terror and conflicts. It has brought death, destruction and suffering to millions.

A culture of peace is an idea that encapsulates the very essence of the efforts to save humanity from the scourge of war and conflict. It is a set of values and attitudes, a mode of behaviour and a way of life to rid our communities of terror and violence. The process of a culture of peace is based on freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance and respect for diversity and dialogue.

The United Nations has been playing a crucial role in propagating peace over the decades of its existence. At the World Summit, our leaders reaffirmed the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. They also committed themselves to taking action to promote this programme at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Following last year's observance of the midpoint of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, we have entered into the second half of the Decade with great enthusiasm and vigour. This calls for renewal of commitments towards the noble goals of peace.

Bangladesh has always been at forefront of the initiatives that promote greater understanding and tolerance among peoples, which in our belief are achievable through dialogue and cooperation. Our attachment to a culture of peace is owed to our long struggle for national independence. Bangladesh, born of a bloody conflict, sees, therefore, great value in the principles of tolerance, respect for diversity, democracy and understanding. These ideals were realized by the Membership by the adoption in 1999 of the Declaration and the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. Bangladesh was honoured to lead the process.

The Programme of Action identifies some major areas of focus, in particular, education, sustainable economic and social development, human rights, equality between men and women, democratic participation, advancing understanding, tolerance and solidarity, participatory communication and free flow of information and knowledge, and international peace and security. Specific sub-areas are set out in each area of focus that would help bring our goals to fruition.

The adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action was of great significance. It provided a clear set of guidelines for action. The text advanced the cause of non-violence. It was a universal document in the real sense, transcending boundaries, cultures, societies and nations. It involved various actors such as States, international organizations, civil society, community leaders, parents, teachers, artists, professors, journalists and humanitarian workers. We believe that the participation of all actors is essential if the building of a peaceful world is to be accomplished

through the convergence of ideas, rather than through confrontation.

Bangladesh is well known for having always sought to play a major role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Its commitment to United Nations peacekeeping remains unflinching, having so far contributed more than 58,000 peacekeepers to 37 United Nations peacekeeping operations. We are pledged and willing to do more if called upon.

At home, Bangladesh society has been undergoing a significant positive transformation, particularly in the field of socio-economic development — poverty reduction, raising per capita income, maintaining food security, maintaining a gross domestic product growth rate of over 5 per cent for over two decades, increasing resilience to meet natural disasters, improving the human development index, reducing gender disparity, and improving social and health indicators.

From our national experience, we believe that gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women are categorical imperatives for development, as well as for social stability and peace. Access to education and health, combined with provisions for microcredit facilities, can unleash the entrepreneurial skills of women. The empowerment of women tends to marginalize extremist thought and action in the community, thereby addressing a root cause of violence and terror. The award of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize to microcredit pioneer Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh clearly demonstrates the linkage between poverty alleviation, women's empowerment and peace. Bangladesh, despite its many and varied constraints, has set an example in this domain. It stands ready to share its best practices with other societies of comparable milieu.

We are at a crossroads in advancing our goals pertaining to a culture of peace, having crossed the midpoint of the Decade. We wish to express our gratitude to all actors that have contributed to its promotion. In this connection, we applaud the role of UNESCO, as well as other involved organizations within and outside the United Nations system. We are particularly thankful to civil society, including non-governmental organizations and young people, including the young foot soldiers of the Fundación Cultura de Paz. We still have a long way to go and much remains to be done. We urge everyone to continue their good work; at this critical juncture, a strengthened global partnership is an absolute must.

We believe that the promotion of a culture of peace is of paramount importance, particularly today, when conflicts bred of misunderstanding and intolerance abound. It is in this perspective that I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010" (A/61/L.16).

The draft contains some technical updates vis-à-vis last year's resolution 60/3, including the following additional elements: in the final preambular paragraph, the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission is welcomed and encouraged, in operative paragraphs, to promote the culture of peace and non-violence for children in its activities. At the sixtieth session, this resolution received a record 107 sponsors. It is our fond hope that this year, too, delegations will accord similar support to our initiative, reflecting global solidarity in the endeavours to achieve this noble aim. It is our belief that some day this resolution will carry the sponsorship of each and every delegation.

Our ultimate objective is to create a world that is peaceful and stable, where the ambience is appropriate for development, where the environment is protected, where rule of law and observance of human rights are the norms, where different civilizations and religions coexist side by side in harmony and where the preponderant value is a culture of peace. This draft resolution is but one way towards reaching that goal. We hope it will receive all delegations' enthusiastic support.

Mr. Tornudd (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The Declaration on a Culture of Peace, adopted by the Assembly seven years ago, set out a number of important principles that retain their full validity today. A culture of peace is not a target to be reached once and forever. It comprises an ongoing process of dialogue, education and participation.

The European Union is favourably impressed with the enthusiasm that has resulted in such a large number of initiatives being advanced under this heading. We look forward to further practical action at the international, regional, national and local levels in order to advance the various objectives contained in the Declaration on a Culture of Peace.

The subject is, in fact, so vast that our comments on this occasion will address only some of the points that are relevant to the specific initiatives and actions that we are set to examine.

We are grateful to the Director-General of UNESCO, who has provided us with an updated report (A/61/175) on the work undertaken by his organization. We note with particular satisfaction that the efforts to foster a culture of peace seem to have permeated the activities of a very large number of bodies and organizations within the United Nations system. We are also happy to note that civil society has been actively engaged in furthering the objectives of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

The declarations and other statements on a culture of peace that we make in the plenary meetings of intergovernmental organizations will have no value if their substance is not felt in the lives of ordinary people. The role of youth is particularly important in this regard. We hope that youth groups and youth organizations will play a prominent role in all activities related to the culture of peace.

We have taken note of the recommendations contained in concluding paragraph 59 of the report of the Director-General of UNESCO and hope that they will inspire Member States to take action accordingly and to enhance their efforts in human rights education. We also have full confidence in the ability of UNESCO to continue monitoring activities in this field. In view of the long-term relevance of this matter, the European Union would, for its part, and with the agreement of other Member States, actually be ready to deal with this matter in the General Assembly every two years, instead of every year, as has been the case to date. Specific subjects coming under the heading of a culture of peace could, of course, be taken up as the need arises.

Among the ongoing projects of importance in this context, we are obviously aware of the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, although it is not the focus of our attention this year. We look forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of this Dialogue, which is due at the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The alliance of civilizations, on the other hand, is of immediate importance. Since the report of the High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations is expected later this month, we hope that there will be opportunities in the near future to seek inspiration in their document for practical action to promote tolerance and understanding between all cultures and religions.

Furthermore, we should be mindful of Security Council resolution 1624 (2005), which calls upon all States to continue international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding between civilizations in an effort to prevent the indiscriminate targeting of different religions and cultures, as well as to counter the incitement of terrorist acts motivated by extremism and intolerance.

At the same time, the European Union wishes to emphasize the paramount importance of freedom of expression. We are deeply convinced that fruitful dialogue cannot be guided by Government authorities. There is no point in drawing up strategies or guidelines for an interchange between societies representing different civilizations unless it has a firm base in free and spontaneous participation in the public debate. The best way to suppress extremist views and incitement to hatred is to let such utterances wilt and die in open debate, where they have no chance of survival. The full richness of cultural dialogue will flourish in a climate of free expression.

It is up to Governments, of course, to provide the proper framework for freedom of expression. This means that full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is of central importance. Most human rights are of such a nature that their enjoyment can be further promoted in all societies, regardless of their stage of economic and social development. We can all do better. Freedom of religion, for example, is not only the absence of prohibitions; it can also include creating appropriate conditions for the practice of religion without discrimination.

Likewise, exercising the right to education in the context of a culture of peace should include efforts to promote education for peace. That is, in fact, one of the longstanding ambitions of UNESCO. Finally, all public

dialogue will benefit from the increased participation of women and young persons.

The European Union will examine attentively the draft resolutions submitted under the item on a culture of peace, and looks forward to constructive cooperation with other delegations on this subject.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to commend UNESCO for its leading role in the process of fostering the culture of peace and for its recent comprehensive report (A/61/175), which reflects the broad range of activities carried out by the United Nations system, international institutions and civil society in implementing various programmes and initiatives put forward under agenda item 44, which is now under consideration.

Kazakhstan strongly believes that the culture of peace starts within us when we learn how to respect the inherent worth and dignity of other cultures and religions, and when we allow them to keep up their traditions. The moral standing of any society is judged by how it treats other nations and other peoples' cultures.

The emergence of new challenges and threats to humankind, particularly the rise of religious extremism, which threatens security and stability in the world, makes the need for dialogue among cultures and religions even more urgent. A principal objective of this dialogue is to bridge the gap in knowledge about others. It is important to remember that lack of knowledge and understanding and lack of respect for various cultures and religions has already prepared the ground for hatred.

Intolerance and conflict can be prevented through tireless efforts in day-to-day activities, and by taking timely and concrete actions at the local, national and international levels. Education is the key to promoting tolerance.

We commend the valuable contribution of various initiatives on the promotion of a dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations, including the Dialogue among Civilizations, the Alliance of Civilizations, the Enlightened Moderation strategy and the Interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace initiative. We consider all of these to be mutually inclusive, reinforcing and interrelated. Kazakhstan, as a member of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, shares its aims and looks forward to the report of the high-level panel, which is expected to contain concrete recommendations for the promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among religions.

Historically, the territory of Kazakhstan has been a meeting place for a variety of different religions and civilizations. The population of Kazakhstan is made up of more than 130 ethnic groups and 46 religious denominations. A balanced internal policy has encouraged dialogue between these diverse cultures and this has resulted in a multicultural society with universal values. The culture of the Kazakh people, characterized by tolerance and openness to innovation, has become the backbone of the spiritual integration we have achieved.

The Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, a unique and effective mechanism to pursue a policy towards ethnic groups, was established in 1995. The Assembly has a consultative and advisory status under the President of Kazakhstan. It works to ensure revival of national cultures, languages and traditions, strengthen interethnic unity and develop recommendations and proposals on State policy in the area of interethnic relations.

The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in 2003 in our capital, Astana, has become Kazakhstan's tangible contribution to the strengthening and broadening of interfaith dialogue. One month ago, a second Congress completed its deliberations in Kazakhstan, bringing together high-level religious and political representatives who discussed the Congress' main theme, religion, society and international security. The Congress adopted a Declaration to Enhance the Role and Responsibility of Religious Leaders in the Strengthening of International Security, which was issued as an official document of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Another substantive outcome of the Congress is a decision to establish, under the auspices of the Congress, an international centre of cultures and religions to carry out educational, research and humanitarian projects and to study potential crisis aspects of the religious situation in the world. Congress participants came to understand the need to establish permanent dialogue, which will provide an opportunity to identify paths to peaceful coexistence between confessions and reduce the risk of religious extremism. The Congress has become an important contribution to

peace, accord and broader dialogue among religions and is becoming a credible permanent international forum.

Taking into consideration the importance of dialogue among religions and cultures, our delegation proposes an international year of dialogue among religions and cultures. Such a proposal has been included in a draft resolution, submitted by the Philippines and Pakistan, entitled Promotion of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/61/L.11). As a sponsor, we hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus and that the Members States will therefore show their strong commitment to the promotion of interreligious and inter-ethnic dialogue and concord.

Our delegation also supports and co-sponsored the draft resolution on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for Children of the World, 2001-2010 (A/61/L.16).

Let us work together to take concrete measures to identify and reduce the causes of disagreement between nations, cultures and religions. The world community should foster a model of global culture that will be able to maintain peace, stability and dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

Mr. Alkashwani (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Historical events have shown that the dominance of the culture of violence and war in different parts of the world affected by disputes and conflicts has not only prevented the settlement of those conflicts, but has also led to an increase in violence. This in turn has led to an escalation of tension and discord in those regions and has fostered the culture of hatred and revenge among many generations, irrespective of their affiliations, not to mention the waste of natural and human resources that should have been utilized in the service of humanity. This requires us now, more than ever, to think seriously about how to promote a culture of peace instead of a culture of violence and war, which currently prevails in many volatile regions around the world.

The United Arab Emirates believes that the characteristics of the culture of peace — represented in promoting peaceful coexistence and non-violence among peoples and in containing and preventing conflicts through dialogue, understanding and disarmament — have proved the need for the international community to adopt a joint, comprehensive and multilateral strategy in order to achieve three basic and parallel objectives.

First, the international community must demonstrate a serious political will, avoiding double standards, in order to find peaceful, lasting, just and comprehensive solutions for all the outstanding cases of dominance, colonialism and occupation leftover from the past, particularly the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East, which over the past 58 years have led to many wars and acts of violence, not only in our region, but also around the world.

Second, the dissemination of the concepts of peace should be at the core of sustainable human development. This requires the international community to adhere to the recommendations of United Nations summits on global development and its financing and to the principles of equality and social justice among peoples, particularly after conflicts were found to have been the inevitable consequence of continued competition between North and South and rich and poor, and considering other, local conflicts over control of sources of livelihoods and limited national resources.

Third, efforts to disseminate a culture of peace must include a fundamental transformation in the current values and attitudes of many States and communities, including political and extremist groups, that believe in the need to possess deterrent military and nuclear powers, as well as other means to achieve their self-serving ambitions and interests, or to address their own problems by force, with total disregard for the negative consequences of their acts for regional and international peace and security or for the stability of humankind in general.

With that understanding, we voice our support for all projects aimed at incorporating the principles of understanding, tolerance, respect for human rights, collaboration, gender equality and solidarity and mutual respect among peoples and States, and away from all forms of extremism and hatred in school curricula, in the media and in the educational and awareness programmes designed to consolidate and promote the best human practices and concepts.

In that context, we also affirm the importance of developing existing initiatives aimed at promoting partnership among stakeholders, including the private and public sectors and international and subregional organizations. That will lead to implementation of a

number of important and sustained programmes and events that are intended to promote dialogue among civilizations and peoples and the principles of peaceful coexistence, cultural diversity and religious and cultural cooperation. It will further ensure greater communication and harmony among peoples and enhance their mutual respect and interests, while preventing ongoing attempts to insult, discriminate and hold extremist positions against other religions and nationalities. As has been proven recently, such attempts can contribute to the escalation of tensions and potential conflicts.

The United Arab Emirates — which has pursued a sensible and balanced national and foreign policy based upon ancestral traditions and heritage, as well as on the principles of Islam and Islamic culture that call for solidarity, forgiveness, peaceful coexistence with other peoples, non-violence and respect for pluralism — has actively expanded its diplomatic relations and cultural and economic exchanges with most countries of the world, regardless of their political, economic and ideological orientation or religious beliefs. It has also supported mediation aimed at the containment and management of conflicts, disputes and hotbeds of tensions among States before they occur, and other efforts to promote reconciliation and reconstruction in post-conflict areas.

In order to consolidate its human principles and ethics in its people and in future generations, the United Arab Emirates has pursued a distinctive educational policy that focuses mainly on enhancing educational, media, cultural and social programmes and activities with a view to strengthening the application of the principles of tolerance, brotherhood, freedom, justice, respect for human dignity and human rights, the rule of law, and mutual respect for the cultures, religions and beliefs of other peoples. Those educational policies are also aimed at enhancing the openness of the society of the United Arab Emirates through globalization and current cultural progress, while keeping in mind the Emirates' unique characteristics, in order to ensure its greater participation in national, regional and international development plans so that it may benefit and gain from the present era of globalization.

Convinced of the importance of promoting respect for pluralism and for the rights of others, the Government has enacted a number of local laws and decisions to guarantee to foreign minorities living in the United Arab Emirates the freedom to practice their religious, cultural and social beliefs, traditions and activities. It has encouraged the holding of cultural forums, symposiums, workshops and cultural exhibitions that have attracted intellectuals and journalists, and has included exhibits and folkloric musicians and bands from all over the world to enrich the knowledge and openness of Emirates society towards the diverse concepts and ideas of other civilizations, while taking into consideration its adherence to its own characteristics, heritage and environment.

Finally, we affirm our support for all efforts by the United Nations and its institutions, particularly UNESCO, towards the implementation of General Assembly resolution 60/3, entitled "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010". We hope that the deliberations on this item will contribute to strengthening our collective efforts to enhance international solidarity in fighting the culture of violence and confrontation and in building and consolidating peace in our international relations.

Mr. Elbadri (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, permit me to express our deep appreciation to UNESCO for its valuable report (*see A/61/175*), which includes an overview of activities to implement the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. It reflects the international agreement on fostering a Culture of Peace and the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, which in turn require a concerted effort on our part to operationalize the various visions and recommendations those initiatives entail.

The culture of peace is part of a profound vision of humanity that includes many elements at all levels, including the individual, society, the State and international relations. This culture, which we have adopted for achieving peace and as a sound foundation for international relations, will not be achieved through selective implementation, for it is an all-encompassing umbrella under which many concepts and principles are not only integrated but also complement one another. The world has never been in such need of a culture of peace as it is today. It is not only a necessity but a political responsibility to embrace and implement such a culture, to develop it into a strong foundation upon which we can base the concept of genuine collective security in conjunction with the respect for

international law and the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Today we face a decisive stage in the history of international relations. The number and varying patterns of interactions among States are increasing. This is a natural aspect of globalization that presents us with opportunities for cooperation, complementarity and the fulfilment of mutual interests. Yet certain misunderstandings between peoples and States could also arise as a by-product.

The diversity of cultures, religions, traditions and customs is a complementary aspect of humanity. We face a crossroads today, and our challenge is to avoid turning the added value of differences, the comparative advantage of plurality and the asset of diversity into means for dissension, divisions and conflicts at the international level. This is a time when we can invest in them for the benefit of the international community as a whole.

The means to achieve this noble aim are clear and the road map is well known and can be found in the different declarations and resolutions we have adopted in the General Assembly, be it the culture of peace or the dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples. However, the real problem lies in the political intentions and will to implement such instruments. It is noteworthy that the enthusiasm that was visible when these instruments were adopted has not been the same at the implementation phase. Today, as we discuss the culture of peace, we have to admit that we have not invested in it properly as yet, and this deficiency must be corrected, as soon as possible.

Permit me in that context to discuss a subject closely associated with the culture of peace and which constitutes an important pillar in it, that of the dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions. This dialogue is a vehicle for mutual understanding, a means of overcoming misconceptions and a tool for confirming our mutual belief in a common future for humanity. As events have shown, this dialogue and the culture of peace are important pillars for the promotion of international harmony and peace. However, despite the multiplicity and interaction of initiatives and frameworks that call for activating the dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions, the tangible result of that effort is far below our expectations. There are several basic reasons for that, the most important of which is that we have not implemented the initiatives that we adopted here at the United Nations in this regard, in particular, the international agenda for the dialogue among civilizations, because of the lack of enthusiasm to enter into such an important and constructive dialogue among States, or because of our failure to realize the importance of this dimension in international relations.

We now need a collective effort to push forward and implement the dialogue on the basis of two connected actions: establishing a clear mechanism for such a dialogue, and ensuring that the political will exists to make it succeed.

Dialogue has always been the main instrument for interaction among peoples. We must now agree on how it should be implemented — through the activation of the culture of peace or of the dialogue among civilizations. It will be achieved primarily by ensuring mutual respect for each other and for each other's cultures, with all of their attributes — religions, traditions and customs.

In such a dialogue there is no place for cultural arrogance or monoculturalism. Peoples' experiences and customs must be respected in accordance with the principle of equality among all civilizations and cultures, whatever their various contributions to the civilization of humanity. In this regard, we would like to emphasize the important and enduring contribution to human civilization made by Islamic civilization.

We would like to underscore how important it is that such a dialogue focus on the commonalities that link us, not on the differences that separate us. Furthermore, we must prevent the dialogue from being politicized and must avoid double standards. We hope that all those aspirations will be met through the timely adoption of an initiative on the alliance of civilizations. The report being prepared by the group of eminent persons established by the Secretary-General to operationalize the initiative will be a first step towards the consideration and adoption of a draft resolution on this issue in the General Assembly.

Improving relations among States through the application of the culture of peace and the dialogue among civilizations remains an important challenge. But events at the international level reflect the urgent need to complement those two approaches with a third one. Today, we must lay the foundations for a value-oriented framework that calls for mutual respect — respect for other peoples' religious, cultural, historical

and civilizational experiences, backgrounds and heritages, as well as respect for the rights of others to be different and unique in faith and belief. We need to lay the foundation for a new culture that encompasses all of those elements and others so as to open the way for international, cultural and civilizational pluralism.

Today, we need a new culture of respect to be implemented, together with the culture of peace.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): Last year, at the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, world leaders reaffirmed the need to promote the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, as well as the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and its Programme of Action. My Government greatly appreciates the fact that last year UNESCO, as the lead agency, conducted the mid-term global review of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010.

The culture of peace is based on respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance, the promotion of development, education for peace, the free flow of information and the wider participation of women as integral elements in preventing violence and conflict. All of the activities of the United Nations contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace. On the basis of the review, it is important to find effective approaches for the United Nations system, Member States and civil society to further strengthen the global framework in order to promote a culture of peace.

Japan believes that, if we are to ensure sustainable peace, it is essential to protect people from critical threats to human life and livelihood, and to ensure that people live lives of dignity. With this in mind, Japan strongly promotes the concept of human security and its approach. Let me briefly touch upon issues relating to education and the dialogue among civilizations, which are of particular interest to Japan.

As is often emphasized, peace, development and human rights are linked and complement one another. Japan's own experience in the 60 years since the Second World War bears testimony to that. Recognizing that basic education is a fundamental human right and that investment in education should be the basis for nation-building, Japan has provided official development assistance to the education sector amounting to $4.7 billion over the past five years. In order to achieve the goal of education for all, Japan announced the Basic Education for Growth Initiative at the Group of Eight Kananaskis Summit in 2002. This is an expression of Japan's commitment to supporting developing countries as they improve the quality of their basic education. While respecting their ownership, Japan supports the efforts made by developing countries with a view to ensuring for all the opportunity for primary education and improving the quality of education and educational administration systems.

In 2005, Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, who was Prime Minister of Japan at the time, proposed the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Japan, recognizing that one of the key factors in achieving sustainable development is education, has been contributing to the promotion of that Decade, in partnership with its lead agency, UNESCO, as well as with other international organizations and stakeholders, and we will continue that support in the future.

In the World Summit Outcome Document adopted in September 2005, world leaders acknowledged the diversity in the world, and reaffirmed that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. Globalization, which can bring different civilizations closer, contributes many benefits to society, but it can sometimes also give rise to intolerance among people when they come into contact with cultures and civilizations different from their own. In order to deal with that unfortunate situation, it is of great importance to promote dialogue among people and civilizations, based on the spirit of tolerance and deep mutual understanding.

In that regard, Japan highly commends UNESCO for the major role it played in implementing the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations. Within that framework, UNESCO has organized and sponsored a broad range of activities, conferences and other meetings that have focused on activities aimed at promoting dialogue among civilizations in various regions.

Japan believes that promoting mutual understanding of cultures and civilizations as well as mutually enhancing the development and the dignity of those who belong to different civilizations will contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace. With that in mind, Japan has been actively undertaking a series of efforts to deepen understanding among cultures and civilizations. Japan held the World Civilization Forum in July 2005 to share the

experiences of countries in preserving tradition while moving towards modernization. Japan has also held dialogues such as the Japan-Middle East Cultural Exchange and Dialogue Mission, and we hope to continue to promote similar dialogues in the future.

The culture of peace is a subject related to all human beings. Japan believes that it is of the utmost importance to continue our endeavours, in close cooperation with one another, to expand dialogue and exchange views among cultures and civilizations in order to create a world of harmony and peace, where all human beings live on the basis of the principles of equality and mutual respect. I would therefore like to conclude my statement by reiterating that Japan is determined to redouble its efforts to bring about a culture of peace.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.